Urbanatomy E-publications
Urban Future Pamphlets – Series 1: Time Sequence
(2011-13), #2

Calendric Dominion

Urbanatomy Electronic

Urban Future Pamphlets
Series 1: Time Sequence (2011-13), #2

Calendric Dominion

CEO: Leo Zhou.
Text: Nick Land.
Cover image: Anna Greenspan.
Cover design: Ivy Zhang.

Calendric Dominion

Contents

Introduction

Calendric Dominion

Part 1: Anno Domini

Part 2: Year Zero

Part 3: Caesar with the soul of Christ

Part 4: Counter Calendars

Part 5: From Crimson Paradise to Soft Apocalypse

Part 6: Countdown

Introduction

Calendric Dominion was composed as a series of six posts on the first *Urban Future* blog, over a period of five weeks, from September-November 2011. Initially stimulated by an outburst of traditionalist opposition to the re-coding of the global calendar into (very superficially) ‘neutral’ terms, it aims to exaggerate rather than to appease sectarian discomfort, in order to awaken a question of cultural destiny. The topic it orbits is not of a nature to be easily dispelled.

Could a change in the governing cultural order of the world find a new (or old) reflection for itself, in a profound adjustment of date reckoning conventions? The historical precedent for such an upheaval strongly suggests that any transition of this kind would encounter formidable obstacles. The world is locked into a story it scarcely understands, which entangles it all the more tightly for that. This, it seems, is how things *have to proceed* for quite a while. It is through such impersonal stubbornness that destiny is made manifest.

What, then, are the implications of a Calendric Dominion which exceeds its apparent meaning in multiple directions, while integrating the cultures of the world into a single system of numerical attachments? This is a question that has scarcely begun to register. For it to be sharpened further requires time, and time is what it stamps for us. Eventually, this will matter.

Nick Land (December 2013)

Calendric Dominion

Part 1: Anno Domini

Modernity and hegemony are Urban Future obsessions, which might (at least in part) excuse a link to this article [1] in Britain's *Daily Mail*, on the topic of Christianity, the calendar, and political correctness. It addresses itself to the international dominion of the Gregorian, Western Christian calendar, and the sensitivities of those who, whilst perhaps reconciled to the inevitability of counting in Jesus-years, remain determined to dis-evangelize the accompanying acronymics. More particularly, it focuses upon the BBC, and its attempt to sensitize on other people's behalf (pass the popcorn).

The BBC's religious and ethics department says the changes are necessary to avoid offending non-Christians.

It states: 'As the BBC is committed to impartiality it is appropriate that we use terms that do not offend or alienate non-Christians.

In line with modern practice, BCE/CE (Before Common Era/Common Era) are used as a religiously neutral alternative to BC/AD.'

But the move has angered Christians …

Cue Ann Widdecombe, the Catholic former Tory Minister, who said: 'I think what the BBC is doing is offensive to Christians. They are discarding terms that have been around for centuries and are well understood by everyone.

'What are they going to do next? Get rid of the entire calendar on the basis that it has its roots in Christianity?'

It's an interesting question, and the attempt to hold it open, as provocatively as possible, might be the best reason to avoid glib, politically correct remedies to the 'problem', however that is understood. Anno Domini reminds us of dominion, which is a far better guideline into historical reality than *kumbaya* gestures towards a 'Common Era', as if hegemony had no content beyond togetherness. Since dominion has not been achieved primarily by impoliteness or insensitivity, politically correct multiculturalism is an irrelevant (and dishonest) response to it.

Regardless of whether Jesus is your Lord, or not, the Christian calendar dominates, or at least predominates, and the traditional acronymic accurately registers that fact. *AD bitchez*, as the commentators of Zerohedge [2] might say.

It is an intriguing and ineluctable paradox of globalized modernity that its approximation to universality remains fundamentally structured by ethno-geographical peculiarities of a distinctly pre-modern type. The world was not integrated by togetherness, but by a succession of particular powers, with their characteristic traits, legacies, and parochialisms. For better or for worse, these peculiar features have been deeply installed in the governing order of the world. Their signs should be meticulously conserved and studied rather than clumsily effaced, because they are critical clues to the real nature of fate.

Without exception, calendars are treasure troves of intricately sedimented ethno-historical information. They attempt to solve an ultimately insoluble problem, by arithmetically rationalizing irrational astronomical quantities, most obviously the incommensurable cycles of the terrestrial orbit (solar year), lunar orbit (month), and terrestrial rotation (day). No coherent arithmetical construct can ever reconcile these periods, and even a repulsively inelegant calendar can only do so to a tolerable margin of error. The

consequent ramshackle compromise, typically deformed by a torturous series of adjustments, reshufflings, and intercalations, tells an elaborate story of fixed and variable cultural priorities, regime changes, legacy constraints, alien influences, conceptual capabilities, and observational refinements, further complicated by processes of drift, adoption, and innovation that ripple through numerical and linguistic signs.

The hegemonic (Gregorian) calendar, for instance, is a jagged time-crash of incommensurable periods, in which multiple varieties of disunity jostle together. Weeks don't fit into solar and lunar months, or years, but cut through them quasi-randomly, so that days and dates slide drunkenly across each other. The length of the week is biblical, but the names of the days combine ancient astrology (Saturday-Monday) with the gods of Norse mythology (Tuesday-Friday). Although the Nordic-linguistic aspect of the week has not been strongly globalized, its Judeo-numerical aspect has. The months are a ghastly mess, awkwardly mismatched with each other, with the lunar cycle, and with the succession of weeks, and testifying to the confused, erratic astro-politics of the Roman Empire in their linguistic mixture of deities (January, March, April?, May, June), festivals (February), emperors (July, August), and numbers (September-December). There is no need to excavate into this luxuriant dung-hill here, except to note that the 'Christianity' of the Western calendar rests upon chaos-rotted pagan and poly-numeric foundations.

What matters to the AD-BC (vs CE-BCE) debate is not the multitudinously-muttering inner disorder of the Western calendar, but its estimation of the years, or 'era'. In this regard, it has clear competitors, and thus arouses definite resentments, since its closest cousins assert eras of their own. The era of the Hebrew calendar dates back to the *tohu* (chaos) of the year before creation, and records the years of the world (Latinized as *Anno Mundi*), to the present 5772 AM. The Islamic calendar, which begins from the *Hejira* of Mohammed, from Mecca to Medina, reached 1432 AH in AD 2011.

The Christian calendar, first systematized in AD 525 by Dionysius Exiguus (Dennis the Runt), counts the first *Anno Domini Nostri Iesu Christi* as the birth year of Jesus Ben Joseph, a false messiah to the Jews, the Christ and Redeemer for the Christians, a prophet to the Moslems, the Nazarene oppressor to Satanists, and something else, or nothing much, to everybody else. Regardless of the accuracy of its chronology or tacit theology, however, this is the year count that has been globally inherited from the real process of modernity, and recognized as a world standard by the United Nations, among other international organizations.

Compared to the Abrahamic calendars, those of Asia's demographic giants generally lacked tight doctrinal and didactic focus. India can usually be relied upon to inundate any topic whatsoever in delirious multiplicity, and the calendar is no exception. Bengali, Malayalam, and Tamil calendars are all widely used in their respective regions, the Indian National Calendar counts from AD 78 = 0, which, in ominous keeping with current events, places us in 1933, and the most widely accepted Hindu religious calendar total the years since the birth of Krishna, reaching 5112 in AD 2011.

The fabulous complexity of China's traditional calendar makes it a paradise for nerds [3]. Most commonly, it counts the years of each imperial reign, and is thus integrated by a literary narrative of dynastic history, rather than an arithmetical continuum. (The obstacle this presented to modernistic universalization is brutally obvious.) Alternatively, however, it groups historical time into sixty-year cycles, beginning from 2637 BC (which places us in the 28th year of cycle-78). Most Chinese today seem to have an extremely tenuous connection to this dimension of their calendrical heritage, which scarcely survives outside academic departments of ancient history, and in Daoist temples. Whilst the internal structure of the traditional year survives undamaged, as attested by the annual cycle of festivities, Chinese surrender to the Gregorian year count seems absolute.

Christian conservatives are surely right to argue that it is the year count – the number and the era – that matters. The acronyms are merely explanatory, and even essentially tautological. Once it has been decided that history is measured from and divided by the birth of Jesus, it is far too late to quibble over the attribution of dominance. *AD bitchez*. That argument is over.

Notes

[1] Available online at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2041265/BBC-turns-year-Our-Lord-2-000-years-Christianity-jettisoned-politically-correct-Common-Era.html#ixzz1ZPbIRDgA

[2] http://www.zerohedge.com/

[3] http://www.math.nus.edu.sg/aslaksen/calendar/cal.pdf

Part 2: Caesar with the soul of Christ

Political Correctness has tacitly legislated against the still-prevailing acronyms that define the hegemonic international calendar (BC-AD), and proposed clear alternatives (BCE-CE). Both the criticism and the suggestion are entirely consistent with its principles. In accordance with the tenets of multiculturalism (a more recent and also more active hegemony), it extends the liberal assumption of formal equality from individuals to 'cultures', allocating group rights, and identifying – whilst immediately denouncing – discrimination and privilege. As might be expected from an ideology that is exceptionally concentrated among intellectual elites, the proposed remedy is purely symbolic, taking the form of a rectification of signs. The 'problem' is diagnosed as a failure of consciousness, or sensitivity, requiring only a raising of awareness (to be effected, one can safely assume, by properly credentialed and compensated professionals).

Even considered in its own terms, however, the rectification that is suggested amounts to nothing more than an empty gesture of refusal, accompanying fundamental compliance. Whilst the symbolic 'left' draw comfort from the insistence upon inconsequential change, with its intrinsic offense against conservative presumptions, reinforced by an implied moral critique of tradition, the counter-balancing indignation of the 'right' fixes the entire dispute within the immobilized trenches of the Anglo-American 'culture war'. The deep structure of calendric signs persists unaffected. Between Christian dominion (invoking 'Our Lord') and a 'common era' that is obediently framed by the dating of Christian revelation, there is no difference that matters. It is the count that counts.

Political Correctness fails here in the same way it always does, due to its disconnection of 'correctness' from any rigorous principle of calculation, and its disengagement of 'sensitivity' from realistic perception. A calendar is a profound cultural edifice, orchestrating the apprehension of historical time. As such, it is

invulnerable to the gnat-bites of ideological irritability (and dominance is not reducible to impoliteness).

The problem of Western Calendric Dominion is not one of supremacism (etiquette) but of supremacy (historical fatality). It might be posed: How did modernistic globalization come to be expressed as Christian Oecumenon? In large measure, this is Max Weber's question, and Walter Russell Mead's, but it overflows the investigations of both, in the direction of European and Middle Eastern antiquity. Initial stimulation for this inquiry is provided by a strange – even fantastic -- coincidence.

In his notebooks, Friedrich Nietzsche imagined the overman (Übermensch) as a "Caesar with the soul of Christ," a chimerical being whose tensions echo those of the Church of Rome, Latinized Christian liturgy, and the Western calendar. This hybridity is expressed by a multitude of calendric features, following a broad division of labor between a Roman structuring of the year (within which with superficially-Christianized pagan festivals are scattered unsystematically), and a Christian year count, but it also points towards a cryptic -- even radically unintelligible -- plane of fusion.

In the Year Zero, which never took place, a mysterious synchronization occurred, imperceptibly and unremarked, founding the new theopolitical calendric order. For the Christians, who would not assimilate the Empire until the reign of Constantine in the early-4th century AD, God was incarnated as man, in the embryo of Jesus Christ. Simultaneously, in a Rome that was perfectly oblivious to the conception of the Messiah, the Julian calendar became operational. Julius Caesar's calendric reform had begun 45 years earlier, following the Years of Confusion, but incompetent execution in subsequent decades had systematically mis-timed the leap year, intercalating a day every three years, rather than every four. The anomalous triennial cycle was abandoned and "the Roman calendar was finally aligned to the Julian calendar in 1 BC (with AD 1 the first full year of alignment)," although no special significance would be assigned to these years until Dionysius Exiguus integrated Christian history in AD 525.

Given the astounding neglect of this twin event, some additional emphasis is appropriate: The Julian calendar, which would persist, unmodified, for almost 1,600 years, and which still dominates colloquial understanding of the year's length (at 365.25 days), was born – by sheer and outrageous 'chance' – at the precise origin of the Christian Era, as registered by the Western, and now international, numbering of historical time. The year count thus exactly simulates a commemoration of the calendar itself – or at least of its prototype – even though the birth of this calendar, whether understood in the terms of secular reason or divine providence, has absolutely no connection to the counted beginning. This is a coincidence – which is to say, a destiny perceived without comprehension – that neither Roman authority nor Christian revelation has been able to account for, even as it surreptitiously shapes Western (and then Global) history. As the world's dominant calendar counts the years under what appears to be a particular religious inspiration, it refers secretly to its own initiation, alluding to mysteries of time that are alien to any faith. That much is simple fact.

Unlike the Julian calendar, the Gregorian calendar was determined under Christian auspices, or at least formal Christian authority (that of Pope Gregory XIII), and promulgated by papal bull in 1582. Yet a glance suffices to reveal the continuation of Julian calendric dominion, since the Gregorian reform effects transformations that remain strictly compliant with the Julian pattern, modified only by elementary operations of decimal re-scaling and inversion. Where the Julian calendar took four years as its base cyclical unit, the Gregorian takes four centuries, and where the Julian adds one leap day in four years, the Gregorian leaves one and subtracts three in 400. The result was an improved approximation to the tropical year (averaging ~365.24219 days), from the Julian 365.25 year, to the Gregorian 365.2425, a better than 20-fold reduction in discrepancy from an average ~0.00781 days per year (drifting off the seasons by one day every 128 years) to ~0.00031 (drifting one day every 3,226 years).

The combination of architectonic fidelity with technical adjustment defines conservative reform. It is clearly evident in this case. A neo-Julian calendar, structured in its essentials at its origin in AD 1 minus 1, but technically modified at the margin in the interest of improved accuracy, armed the West with the world's most efficient large-scale time-keeping system by the early modern period. In China, where the Confucian literati staged competitions to test various calendars from around the world against the prediction of eclipses, Jesuits equipped with the Gregorian calendar prevailed against all alternatives, ensuring the inexorable trend towards Western calendric conventions, or, at least, the firm identification of Western methods with modernistic efficiency. Given only an edge, in China and elsewhere, the dynamics of complex systems took over, as 'network effects' locked-in the predominant standard, whilst systematically marginalizing its competitors. Even though Year Zero was still missing, it was, ever increasingly, missing at the same time for everyone. "Caeser with the soul of Christ" – the master of Quadrennium and eclipse -- had installed itself as the implicit meaning of world history.

Part 3: Year Zero

A Year Zero signifies a radical re-beginning, making universal claims. In modern, especially recent modern times, it is associated above all with ultra-modernist visions of total politics, at is maximum point of utopian and apocalyptic extremity. The existing order of the world is reduced to nothing, from which a new history is initiated, fundamentally disconnected from anything that occurred before, and morally indebted only to itself. Predictably enough, among conservative commentators (in the widest sense), such visions are broadly indistinguishable from the corpse-strewn landscapes of social catastrophe, haunted by the ghosts of unrealizable dreams.

Christianity's global Calendric Dominion is paradoxical -- perhaps even 'dialectical' -- in this regard. It provides the governing model of historical rupture and unlimited ecumenical extension, and thus of total revolution, whilst at the same time representing the conservative order antagonized by modernistic ambition. Its example incites the lurch to Year Zero, even as it has no year zero of its own. Ultimately, its dialectical provocation tends towards Satanic temptation: the promise of Anti-Christian Apocalypse, or absolute news to a second power. ("If the Christians could do it, why couldn't we?" Cue body-counts scaling up towards infinity.)

This tension exists not only between an established Christian order and its pseudo-secular revolutionary after-image, but also within Christianity itself, which is split internally by the apparent unity and real dissociation of 'messianic time'. The process of Christian calendric consolidation was immensely protracted. A distance of greater than half a millennium separated the clear formulation of the year count from the moment commemorated, with further centuries required to fully integrate historical recording on this basis, digesting prior Jewish, Roman, and local date registries, and laying the foundation for a universalized Christian articulation of time. By the time the revolutionary 'good news' had been coherently formalized into a recognizable prototype of the hegemonic Western

calendar, it had undergone a long transition from historical break to established tradition, with impeccable conservative credentials.

Simultaneously, however, the process of calendric consolidation sustained, and even sharpened, the messianic expectation of punctual, and truly contemporary rupture, projected forwards as duplication, or 'second coming' of the initial division. Even if the moment in which history had been sundered into two parts -- before and after, BC and AD -- now lay in quite distant antiquity, its example remained urgent, and promissory. Messianic hope was thus torn and compacted by an intrinsic historical doubling, which stretched it between a vastly retrospective, gradually recognized beginning, and a prospect of sudden completion, whose credibility was assured by its status as repetition. What had been would be again, transforming the AD count into a completed sequence that was confirmed in the same way it was terminated (through Messianic intervention).

Unsurprisingly, the substantial history of Western calendric establishment is twinned with the rise of millenarianism, through phases that trend to increasingly social-revolutionary forms, and eventually make way for self-consciously anti-religious, although decidedly eschatological, varieties of modernistic total politics. Because whatever has happened must -- at least -- be possible, the very existence of the calendar supports anticipations of absolute historical rupture. Its count, simply by beginning, prefigures an end. What starts can re-start, or conclude.

Zero, however, intrudes diagonally. It even introduces a comic aspect, since whatever the importance of the Christian revelation to the salvation of our souls, it is blatantly obvious that it failed to deliver a satisfactory arithmetical notation. For that, Christian Europe had to await the arrival of the decimal numerals from India, via the Moslem Middle East, and the ensuing revolution of calculation and book-keeping that coincided with the

Renaissance, along with the birth of mercantile capitalism in the city states of northern Italy.

Indeed, for anybody seeking a truly modern calendar, the Arrival of Zero would mark an excellent occasion for a new year zero (AZ 0?), around AD 1500. Yet, although this would plausibly date the origin of modernity, the historical imprecision of the event counts against it. In addition, the assimilation of zero by germinal European (and thus global) capitalism was evidently gradual -- if comparatively rapid -- rather than a punctual 'revolutionary' transition of the kind commemorative calendric zero is optimally appropriate to. (If Year Zero is thus barred from the designation of its own world-historic operationalization, it is perhaps structurally doomed to misapplication and the production of disillusionment.)

The conspicuous absence of zero from the Western calendar (count) -- exposed in its abrupt jolt from 1 BC to AD 1 -- is an intolerable and irreparable stigma that brings its world irony to a zenith. In the very operation of integrating world history, in preparation for planetary modernity, it remarks its own debilitating antiquity and particularity, in the most condescending modern sense of the limited and the primitive -- crude, defective and underdeveloped.

How could a moment of self-evident calculative incompetence provide a convincing origin-point for subsequent historical calculation? Year Zero escaped all possibility of conceptual apprehension at the moment in the time-count where it is now seen to belong, and infinity (the cryptic reciprocal of zero) proves no less elusive. Infinity was inserted into a time when (and place where) it demonstrably made no sense, and the extraordinary world-historical impression that it made did nothing -- not even nothing -- to change that situation. Is this not a worthy puzzle for theologians? Omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, yet hopeless at maths -- these are not the characteristics of a revelation designed to impress technologists or accountants. All the more reason, then, to take this comedy seriously, in all its ambivalence -- since the emerging world of technologists and accountants, the techno-commercial (runway-

industrial, or capitalist) world that would globalize the earth, was weaned within the playpen of this calendar, and no other. Modernity had selected to date itself in a way that its own kindergarten students would scorn.

Part 4: Counter Calendars

Between the world we would like to inhabit, and the world that exists, there's a gap that tests us. Even the simplest description of this gap already calls for a decision. 'Ideologies' in the broadest, and culturally almost all-consuming sense, serve primarily to soften it. Sense, and even compassion, is attributed to the side of reality, promising ultimate reconciliation between human hopes and desires and the 'objective' nature of things. Science, a typically despised and misanthropic discipline, tends to the opposite assumption, emphasizing the harsh indifference of reality to human interests and expectations, with the implication that the lessons it teaches us can be administered with unlimited brutality. We can dash ourselves against reality if we insist, but we cannot realistically anticipate some merciful moderation of the consequences. Nature does not scold or punish, it merely breaks us, coldly, upon the rack of our untruths.

Like other cultural institutions, calendars are saturated with ideologies, and tested to destruction against implacable reality. Their collision with nature is especially informative, because they express obstinate human desires as favored numbers (selected from among small positive integers), and they register the gulf of the real in a strictly quantitative form. Any surviving calendar relates the story of an adaptation to reality, or cultural deference to (and deformation by) nature, as numerical preferences have been compromised through their encounter with quantitative facts.

Pure ideology in the calendrical sphere is represented in its perfection by the fantasy year of the ancient Mesopotamians, 360 days in length, and harmonized to the sexagesimal (modulus-60) arithmetic of the Sumerians. Its influence has persisted in the 360 degrees of the geometric circle, and in the related sexagesimal division into minutes and seconds (of time and arc). The archaic calendars of Meso-America and East Asia, as well as those of the Middle East, seem to have been attracted to the 360-day year, as though to an ideal model. If the Great Architect of the Universe had

been an anthropomorphic geometer, this is the calendar that would work.

Of course, it doesn't (with all due respect to the engrossing Biblical counter-argument outlined here [1]). Instead, in the mainstream world calendric tradition – as determined by the eventual global outcome – a first level adaptation systematized the year at 365 days – the Egyptian year. Unlike the 360-day archetypal year, which has all of the first three primes as factors, and thus divides conveniently into 'months' or other component periods, the 365-day year represents a reluctant concession to quantitative fact. The number 365 has only two factors (both primes, 5 and 73), but neither seems to have acquired any discernible calendrical valency, perhaps because of their obvious unsuitability to even approximate description of lunar periods. The Egyptians turned instead to an awkward but influential innovation: the intercalation. A five-day appendix was added to the year, as a sheer correction or supplementary commensuration, and an annual reminder of the gap between numerical elegance and astronomical reality. Whilst intercalations were invested with mytho-religious significance, this was essentially compensatory – a crudely obscured testament to the weakness of ideality (and thus of systematic priest-craft as a mode of reality apprehension, or efficient social purpose). If intercalations were necessary, then nature was not spell-bound, and the priest-masters of calendric time were exposed, tacitly, as purveyors of mystification, whose limits were drawn by the horizon of social credulity. Astronomical time mocked the meanings of men.

Over time, the real ('tropical') year discredits its calendrical idealizations by unmooring dates from the seasons, in a process of time drift that exposes discrepancy, and drives calendar reform. Inaccurate calendars are gradually rendered meaningless, as the seasonal associations of its time terms are eroded to utter randomness – by frigid 'summer' months and scorching 'winter' ones. Clearly, no priesthood can survive in a climate that derides the established order of the year, and in which farmers that listen to the holy words (of time) are assured inevitable starvation. Unless

tracked within a tolerable margin of accuracy by a calendar that ‘keeps’ the time, the year reverts to an alien and unintelligible thing, entirely exterior to cultural comprehension, whilst society’s reigning symbols appear as a risible, senseless babble, drowned out by the howling chaos of the real.

With the introduction of the Julian calendar, coinciding with the (non-event) of Year Zero, comes the recognition that the tropical year is incommensurable with any integer, and that a larger cycle of intercalation is required to track it. A kind of modernity, or structural demystification, is born with the relinquishment of the ideal year, and everything it symbolizes in terms of cosmic design or celestial harmony. The devil’s appendix is attached, irremovably.

Numeracy and time measurement divorce at the origin of caesarean Calendric Dominion, but it is easy to mistake accidents on this path for essential concessions to reality. Even allowing for the inescapable function of intercalations, there was nothing inevitable – at least absolutely or cosmically inevitable – about the utter ruination of numerical coherence that the Julian calendar incarnated, and passed on.

To explore this (admittedly arcane) topic further requires a digression to the second power, into the relations between numbers and anthropomorphic desire. The obvious starting point is the 360-day calendar of ancient Sumer, and the question: *What made this number appealing?* Whether examining 360, or its sexagesimal root (60), an arithmetically-conventional attention to prime factors (2, 3, and 5), is initially misleading -- although ultimately indispensable. A more illuminating introduction begins with the compound factors 10 and 12, the latter relevant primarily to the lunar cycle (and the archaic dream of an astronomically – or rather astrologically -- consistent 12-month year), and the former reflecting the primordial anthropomorphism in matters numeric: decimalism. The 360-day calendar is an object of human desire because it is an anthropo-lunar (or menstrual-lycanthropic?) hybrid, speaking intrinsically to the cycles of human fertility, and to the ‘digital’ patterns instantiated in

mammalian body-plans. A 360-day year would be *ours* (even if alien things are hidden in it).

Anthropomorphic decimalism suggests how certain numerical opportunities went missing, along with zero. ‘Apprehension’ and ‘comprehension’ refer understanding to the prehensile organs of a specific organism, whose bilateral symmetry combines five-fingered hands to produce a count reaching ten, across an interval that belongs to an alien, intractable, third. Triadic beings are monsters, and decimally ungraspable. The bino-decimal structure of the *Yi Jing* exhibits this with total clarity, through its six-stage time-cycle that counts in the recurrent sequence 1, 2, 4, 8, 7, 5 ... Each power of three (within the decimal numerals) is expelled along with zero from the order of apprehensible time. There is no way that a ternary calendric numeracy could ever have been anthropomorphically acceptable – the very thought is (almost definitionally) abominable.

Yet astronomy seems hideously complicit with abomination, at least, if the years are twinned. The sixth power of three (3^6) approximates to the length of two tropical years with a discrepancy of just ~1.48438 days, or less than one day a year. An intercalation of three days every four years (or two twin-year cycles) brings it to the accuracy of the Julian calendar, and a reduction of this intercalation by one day every 128 years (or 64 (2^6) twin-year cycles) exceeds the accuracy of the Gregorian calendar.

It might be necessary to be slightly unbalanced to fully appreciate this extraordinary conjunction of numerical elegance and astronomical fact. A system of calendric computation that counts only in twos and threes, and which maintains a perfectly triadic order of time-division up to the duration of a two-year period, is able to quite easily exceed the performance of the dominant international calendar (reaching a level of accuracy that disappears into the inherent instability of the tropical year, and is thus strictly speaking unimprovable).

How many days are there in a year? ((3 x 3 x 3 x 3 x 3 x 3) / 2) + ~0.74219

The horror, the horror …

Notes

[1] http://www.360calendar.com/index.htm

Part 5: From Crimson Paradise to Soft Apocalypse

Despite its modernity and decimalism, the French *calendrier républicain* or *révolutionnaire* had no Year Zero, but it re-set the terms of understanding. A topic that had been conceived as an intersection of religious commemoration with astronomical fact became overtly ideological, and dominated by considerations of secular politics. The new calendar, which replaced AD 1792 with the first year of the new 'Era of Liberty', lasted for less than 14 years. It was formally abolished by Napoléon, effective from 1 January 1806 (the day after *10 Nivôse an XIV*), although it was briefly revived during the Paris Commune (in AD 1871, or *Année 79 de la République*), when the country's revolutionary enthusiasm was momentarily re-ignited.

For the left, the calendric re-set meant radical re-foundation, and symbolic extirpation of the *Ancien Régime*. For the right, it meant immanentization of the eschaton, and the origination of totalitarian terror. Both definitions were confirmed in 1975, when Year Zero was finally reached in the killing fields of the Kampuchean Khmer Rouge, where over a quarter of the country's population perished during efforts to blank-out the social slate and start over. Khmer Rouge leader Saloth Sar (better known by his nom de guerre Pol Pot) had made 'Year Zero' his own forever, re-branded as a South-east Asian final solution.

Year Zero was henceforth far too corpse-flavored to retain propaganda value, but that does not render the calendric equation 1975 = 0 insignificant (rather the opposite). Irrespective of its parochialism in time and space, corresponding quite strictly to a re-incarnation of (xenophobic-suicidal) 'national socialism', it defines a meaningful epoch, as the high-water mark of utopian overreach, and the complementary re-valorization of conservative pragmatism. Appropriately enough, Year Zero describes an instant without

duration, in which the age of utopian time is terminated in exact coincidence with its inauguration. The era it opens is characterized, almost perfectly, by its renunciation, as fantasy social programming extinguishes itself in blood and collapse. The immanent eschaton immediately damns itself.

Historical irony makes this excursion purely (sub-) academic, because the new era is essentially disinclined to conceive itself as such. What begins from this Year Zero is a global culture of ideological exhaustion, or of 'common sense', acutely sensitive to the grinning death's head hidden in beautiful dreams, and reconciled to compromise with the non-ideal. From the perspective of fantastic revolutionary expectation, the high-tide of perfectionist vision ebbs into disillusionment and tolerable dissatisfaction – *but at least it doesn't eat our children*. The new era's structural modesty of ambition has no time for a radical re-beginning or crimson paradise, even when it is historically defined by one.

Pol Pot's Year Zero is sandwiched between the publication of Eric Voegelin's *The Ecumenic Age* (1974), and the first spontaneous Chinese mass protests against the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (over the months following the death of Zhou Enlai, in January 1976). It is noteworthy in this regard that Deng Xiaoping eulogized Zhou at his memorial ceremony for being "modest and prudent" (thus the New Aeon speaks).

In the Anglo-American world, the politics of ideological exhaustion were about to take an explicitly conservative form, positively expressed as 'market realism' (and in this sense deeply resonant with, as well as synchronized to, Chinese developments). Margaret Thatcher assumed leadership of the British Conservative Party in February 1975, and Ronald Reagan declared his presidential candidacy in November of the same year. The English-speaking left would soon be traumatized by a paradoxical 'conservative revolution' that extracted relentless energy from the very constriction of political possibility. What could not happen quickly became the primary social dynamo, as articulated by the

Thatcherite maxim: “There is no alternative” (= option zero). The auto-immolation of utopia had transmuted into a new beginning.

Whilst the era of not restarting from zero can be dated to approximate accuracy (from AD *n* – 1975), and had thus in fact restarted from zero, in profoundly surreptitious fashion, its broad consequence was to spread and entrench (Gregorian) Calendric Dominion ever more widely and deeply. The prevailing combination of radically innovative globalization (both economic and technological) with prudential social conservatism made such an outcome inevitable. Symbolic re-commencement wasn’t on anybody’s agenda, and even as the postmodernists declared the end of ‘grand narratives’, the first planetary-hegemonic narrative structure in history was consolidating its position of uncontested monopoly. Globalization was the story of the world, with Gregorian dating as its grammar.

Orphaned by ideological exhaustion, stigmatized beyond recovery by its association with the Khmer Rouge, and radically maladapted to the reigning spirit of incremental pragmatism, by the late 20th century Year Zero was seemingly off the agenda, unscheduled, and on its own. Time, then, for something truly insidious.

On January 18, 1985, Usenet poster Spencer L. Bolles called attention to a disturbing prospect that had driven a friend into insomnia:

I have a friend that raised an interesting question that I immediately tried to prove wrong. He is a programmer and has this notion that when we reach the year 2000, computers will not accept the new date. Will the computers assume that it is 1900, or will it even cause a problem? I violently opposed this because it seemed so meaningless. Computers have entered into existence during this century, and has software, specifically accounting software, been prepared for this turnover? If this really comes to pass and my friend is correct, what will happen? Is it anything to be concerned about?

Bolles' anonymous friend was losing sleep over what would come to be known as the 'Y2K problem'. In order to economize on memory in primitive early-generation computers, a widely-adopted convention recorded dates by two digits. The millennium and century were ignored, since it was assumed that software upgrades would have made the problem moot by the time it became imminent, close to the 'rollover' (of century and millennium) in the year AD 2000. Few had anticipated that the comparative conservatism of software legacies (relative to hardware development) would leave the problem entirely unaddressed even as the crisis date approached.

In the end, Y2K was a non-event that counted for nothing, although its preparation costs, stimulus effects (especially on outsourcing to the emerging Indian software industry), and panic potential were all considerable. Its importance to the history of the calendar – whilst still almost entirely virtual – is extremely far-reaching.

Y2K resulted from the accidental -- or 'spontaneous' -- emergence of a new calendrical order within the globalized technosphere. Its Year Zero, 0K (= 1900), was devoid of all parochial commemoration or ideological intention, even as it was propagated through increasingly computerized communication channels to a point of ubiquity that converged, asymptotically, with that attained by Western Calendric Dominion over the complete sweep of world history. The 20th century had been recoded, automatically, as the 1st century of the Cybernetic Continuum. If Y2K had completed its reformatting of the planetary sphere-drive in the way some (few deluded hysterics) had expected, the world would now be approaching the end of the year 0K+111, settled securely in its first arithmetically-competent universal calendar, and historically oriented by the same system of electronic computation that had unconsciously decided upon the origin of positive time. Instead, the 'millennium bug' was fixed, and theological date-counting prolonged its dominance, uninterrupted (after much ado about nothing). Most probably, the hegemonic cultural complex encrusted in Calendric

Dominion never even noticed the cybernetic insurrection it had crushed.

Between 0K and Y2K, the alpha and omega of soft apocalypse, there is not only a century of historical time, but also an inversion of attitude. Time departs 0K, as from any point of origin, accumulating elapsed duration through its count. Y2K, in contrast, was a destination, which time approached, as if to an apocalyptic horizon. Whilst not registered as a countdown, it might easily have been. The terminus was precisely determined (no less than the origin), and the strictest formulation of the millennium bug construed the rollover point as an absolute limit to recordable time, beyond which no future was even imaginable. For any hypothetical Y2K-constrained computer intelligence, denied access to dating procedures that over-spilled its two-digit year registry, residual time shrank towards zero as the millennium event loomed. Once all the nines are reached, time is finished, at the threshold of eternity, where beginning and end are indistinguishable (in 0).

“0K, it’s time to wrap this puppy up.” – Revelation 6:14

Part 6: Countdown

At the beginning of the 21st century, global cultural hegemony is on the move. For roughly 500 years, Western -- and later more specifically Anglophone -- societies and agencies have predominantly guided the development of the current world system. As their economic pre-eminence wanes, their cultural and political influence can be expected to undergo a comparable decline.

In the early stages of the coming transition, however, the terminal form of active Western cultural hegemony – multicultural political correctness (MPC) – is well-positioned to manage the terms of the retreat. By reconfiguring basic Western religious and political themes as a systematic sensitization to unwarranted privilege, MPC is able to distance itself from its own heritage and to live on, in the resentment of 'the other', as if it were the neutral adjudicator of disputes it had no part in.

When MPC turns its attention to the Gregorian (or Western Christian) Calendar it is, of course, appalled. But it is also stuck. What could be more insensitive to cultural diversity than an ecumenical date-counting system, rooted in the ethnic peculiarities of Greek-phase Abrahamic religion, which unapologetically celebrates its triumph in the uncompromising words Anno Domini? Yet global convergence demands a standard, no alternative calendar has superior claims to neutrality, and, in any case, the inertial juggernaut of large-scale complex systems – 'lock-in' or 'path-dependency' – pose barriers to switching that seem effectively insuperable. The solution proposed by MPC to this conundrum is so feeble that it amounts to the completion of Gregorian Calendric Dominion, which is to be simultaneously rephrased (politely) and acknowledged in its irresistible universality as the articulation of a 'Common Era'.

MPC supplants problems of cultural power with obfuscatory etiquette, and in absolute terms, its smug dishonesty is difficult to

like. As a relative phenomenon, however, its appeal is more obvious, since radical ‘solutions’ to Gregorian Calendric Dominion, re-beginning at Year Zero, have generally reverted to mass murder. Lacking persuasive claims to a new, fundamental, and universally acknowledged historical break, they have substituted terror for true global singularity, as if fate could be blotted out in blood.

Since resentment gets nowhere, whether in its mild (MPC) or harsh (killing fields) variants, it is worth entertaining alternative possibilities. These begin with attention to real cultural differences, rather than mere ‘cultural diversity’ as it presents itself to the vacuously MPC-processed mind.

Soon after Shanghai had been selected as host city for World Expo 2010 (in December 2002), countdowns started. For Westerners, these probably had space-age associations, triggering memories of the countdowns to ‘blast off’ that were popularized by the Apollo Program, and subsequent science fiction media. It is far from impossible that Chinese shared in these evocations, although they were also able to access a far deeper – which is to say civilizationally fundamental – reservoir of reference. That is because Chinese time typically counts down, modeled, as it is, on the workings of water clocks. The Chinese language systematically describes previous as ‘above’ (*shang*) and next as ‘beneath’ (*xia*), conforming to an intuition of time as descent. Time is counted down as it runs out, from an elevated hydraulic body into the sunken future that receives it. Duration not only flows, it drips.

Perhaps, then, an ‘orientalization’ of calendric perception and organization is something that significantly exceeds a simple (or even exceedingly difficult) renegotiation of beginnings. Re-beginning might be considered largely irrelevant to the problem, at least when compared to the re-orientation from an original to a terminal Year Zero. Whilst not exactly a transition in the direction of time, such a change would involve a transition in the direction of time intuition, simultaneously surpassing the wildest ambitions of calendrical re-

origination and subtly organizing itself ‘within the pores’ of the established order of time.

As modeled by the 2010 Expo, and previously by Y2K, the switch to countdown time does not frontally challenge, or seek to straightforwardly replace, the calendric order in being. Rather than counting in the same way, from a different place, it counts in a different way, within the framework of time already in place. It is a revolution with ‘Chinese characteristics’, which is to say: a surreptitious insurgency, changing what something already was, rather than replacing it with something else.

Both the 2010 Expo and Y2K also reveal the extreme difficulty of any such transition, since a futural Year Zero, or countdown calendar, must navigate the arrow of time and its cognitive asymmetry (between knowledge of the past and of the future), presupposing exact, confident, and consensual prediction. That is why it approximates so closely to conservative acceptance. If the countdown is to be sure of arriving at the scheduled terminus, the destination ‘event’ must already be a date (rather than an empirical ‘happening’). Nothing will suffice except a strictly arithmetical, rigorously certain inevitability, as inescapably pre-destined as the year 2000, or 2010, which cannot but come. From the perspective of the countdown calendar, that is what (Gregorian) Calendric Dominion will have been for. It is an opportunity to program an inevitable arrival.

But when? The sheer passage (fall) of time has assured that the opportunity for calendric revolution presented by the Y2K ‘millennium bug’ has been irretrievably missed (so that AD 1900 ≠ 0). The same is true of World Expo 2010, an event without pretense to be anything beyond a miniature ‘practice’ model of global-temporal singularity. As for the real (techno-commercial) Singularity – that is an imprecise historical prediction, at once controversial and incapable of supporting exact prediction.

A more appropriate prospect is suggested by the science fiction writer Greg Bear, in his novel Queen of Angels, set in

anticipation of the mid-21st century ‘binary millennium’ ($2048 = 2^{11}$). This is a formally suitable, purely calendric ‘event’, deriving its significance from arithmetic rather than ideology or uncertain prophecy. He even envisages it as a moment of insurgent revolution, when artificial intelligence arises surreptitiously, and unnoticed. Yet arbitrariness impairs this date (why the 11th power of 2?), and no serious attempt is made to explain its rise to exceptional cultural prominence.

If an adjusted global culture is to converge upon a countdown date, it must be obvious, intrinsically compelling, and ideologically uncontroversial, in other words, spontaneously plausible. The target that World Expo 2010 suggests (anagrammatically) is AD 2100, a date that performs the final stages of a countdown (2, 1, 0 …). Reinforcing this indication, the Y2K ‘millennium bug’ threatened to re-set the date of AD 2000 to AD 1900, which would have tacitly reiterated itself at the exact end of the 21st century. If it continues to chatter about the calendar, perhaps this is how.

The impending Mayan Apocalypse, scheduled for 21 / 12 / 2012, offers a preliminary chance to indulge in a festival of countdown numbers – like 2010, it looks a lot like another digital singularity simulation. If the morning of December 22nd, 2012, leaves the world with nothing worse than a hangover, it could gradually settle into a new sense of the Years Remaining (to the end of all the time that counts, or the 21st century).

AD 2100 = 0 YR

AD 2099 = 1 YR

AD 2098 = 2 YR

AD 2096 = 4 YR

AD 2092 = 8 YR

AD 2084 = 16 YR

AD 2068 = 32 YR

AD 2036 = 64 YR

AD 1972 = 128 YR

AD 1844 = 256 YR

AD 1588 = 512 YR

AD 1076 = 1024 YR

AD 52 = 2048 YR

It's difficult to anticipate what it looks like from the other side.